

AIDS

The facts everyone should know.

This booklet mentions a wide range of sexual practices some of which some people may find offensive. It was necessary to include this information to make sure everyone gets the facts they need to know to avoid catching or transmitting AIDS.

NACAIDS

AIDS is a virus infection. The word AIDS stands for 'Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.' Today we know that AIDS is caused by a virus called human immunodeficiency virus. HIV for short. The first case of AIDS was diagnosed in Australia in 1982.

Scientists are still not sure where the AIDS virus first started but in the short time since the virus has been discovered, they have learned a great deal about it.

One thing they haven't worked out, however, is how to cure it. But all over the world, research teams are working on ways of slowing and stopping its spread.

Meanwhile, the best way to prevent AIDS is by taking certain precautions when you have sex and if you use intravenous drugs.

This booklet has been prepared by the National Advisory Committee on AIDS (NACAIDS) and is part of the campaign to stop the spread of AIDS.

If you read and follow the suggestions in this booklet, you'll be protecting yourself from AIDS and playing a valuable part in the fight against this deadly disease.

It is transmitted only in very specific ways. AIDS is primarily a sexually transmitted disease. It is also spread through the sharing of needles and syringes.

The AIDS virus can be transmitted by the blood, semen or vaginal secretions of people carrying it.

It cannot be absorbed through the skin, but any cut or open sore in the skin can let it in.

The mucous membranes which line the vagina and the rectum are more fragile than skin and the virus can easily gain access through tiny tears or cuts.

The rectum is particularly vulnerable. It is readily damaged by sexual intercourse, making it easy for the virus to be absorbed and enter the bloodstream.

Today no one remains unmoved by the tragedy of the AIDS epidemic. Only a concerted effort will stop its spread.

PHOTOGRAPH: WILDLIGHT PHOTO AGENCY



It attacks the body's natural defence system.

Our bodies come equipped with a defence system which protects us from disease-causing bacteria and viruses. One of the most important parts of the system is a set of special white blood cells called T4 cells. When the AIDS virus first enters the body, it attaches itself to these cells and enters them. Once inside the cell, the virus usually becomes dormant.

In some people the virus may remain dormant for a long time, (although they are still capable of passing it on.) In other people, something eventually "wakes up" the virus and it becomes active.

As it begins to multiply, the AIDS virus kills off the T4 cells it has invaded and it's at this stage that the infected person starts to notice the initial symptoms of AIDS. Because it kills off T4 cells, the body's ability to fight infection is severely impaired. This means that usually minor infections can spread out of control.

AIDS is a deadly disease with no known cure.

Infection with the AIDS virus has been classified into three stages called Category A, B and C.

Many people who are infected by the AIDS virus show no symptoms at all. The only sign that they have been infected with the virus is a positive blood test for AIDS. People in this group are said to have Category C AIDS. While they may feel and look perfectly well, these people are infectious and can easily pass on the virus. At this stage it is not known how many people with Category C AIDS will progress to the other categories.

Doctors are unsure about the exact percentage who will progress but some believe that healthy changes in lifestyle ... giving up alcohol and smoking, avoiding stress, for example ... can increase the chances of a person with Category C AIDS staying free of illness.

When people infected by the AIDS virus begin to show the first symptoms, they are classified as having

AIDS can have a devastating effect on families. Soon we all will know someone who has caught the virus.

PHOTOGRAPH: WILDLIGHT PHOTO AGENCY



Category B AIDS. This is also called ARC (AIDS related complex).

These symptoms include persistent enlarged glands, unexplained rapid weight loss, diarrhoea and night sweats.

The final stage of AIDS is called Category A AIDS or full AIDS.

The immune systems of these people have been destroyed by the virus and they suffer from infections that healthy people fight off easily.

They may also have purplish marks on their skin known as Kaposi's Sarcoma, a rare cancer. The AIDS virus frequently attacks the person's brain causing memory and thought disorders as well as changes in behaviour.

These opportunistic infections, as they're called, eventually cause death.

There is no cure for AIDS and no vaccine to prevent it.

While research teams all over the world are working on the problem, no effective cure or vaccine is likely to become available for at least several years, if at all.

This means that the only way to stop the spread of AIDS is to teach people how to protect themselves from catching it.

There are three main ways While AIDS is a highly dangerous disease, there are only three ways anyone can catch it:

1. Unprotected sexual contact with an infected person;
2. Infected blood passing into your bloodstream;
3. From mother to baby during pregnancy, at birth or through breast feeding.

Maybe I've already got it. Although the first case of AIDS was not diagnosed until 1982, doctors believe the virus was present in Australia before then.

Abstinence is one way to avoid catching AIDS. Practising safer sex is another.

PHOTOGRAPH: WILDLIGHT PHOTO AGENCY



If you have had a large number of unprotected sexual encounters since 1980 your risk would be greater than someone who has had few sexual encounters. Someone who has been in an exclusive relationship with one person during this period would be considered totally safe.

Heterosexual men and women as well as homosexual men are all at risk of sexual transmission of AIDS. At the present time, homosexual activities and IV drug use present the greatest risks because of the high rate of infection in these groups but anal intercourse is a particularly high risk activity for either sex.

With the large percentage of homosexual men currently carrying the virus, a woman having unprotected sex with a bisexual man also runs a greater risk.

Intravenous drug users are more likely to carry the virus if they have shared needles.

It also follows that an unprotected sexual encounter with an intravenous drug user of either sex would increase risk.

Should I have a test?

The AIDS test is a blood test which shows whether your body has produced antibodies to the AIDS virus. If you carry AIDS antibodies it is a sign that you have contracted the virus. You would be classified as having category C AIDS. A negative result, however, does not guarantee that you do not carry the virus as it takes between two weeks and three months after contact with the virus for the body to produce antibodies.

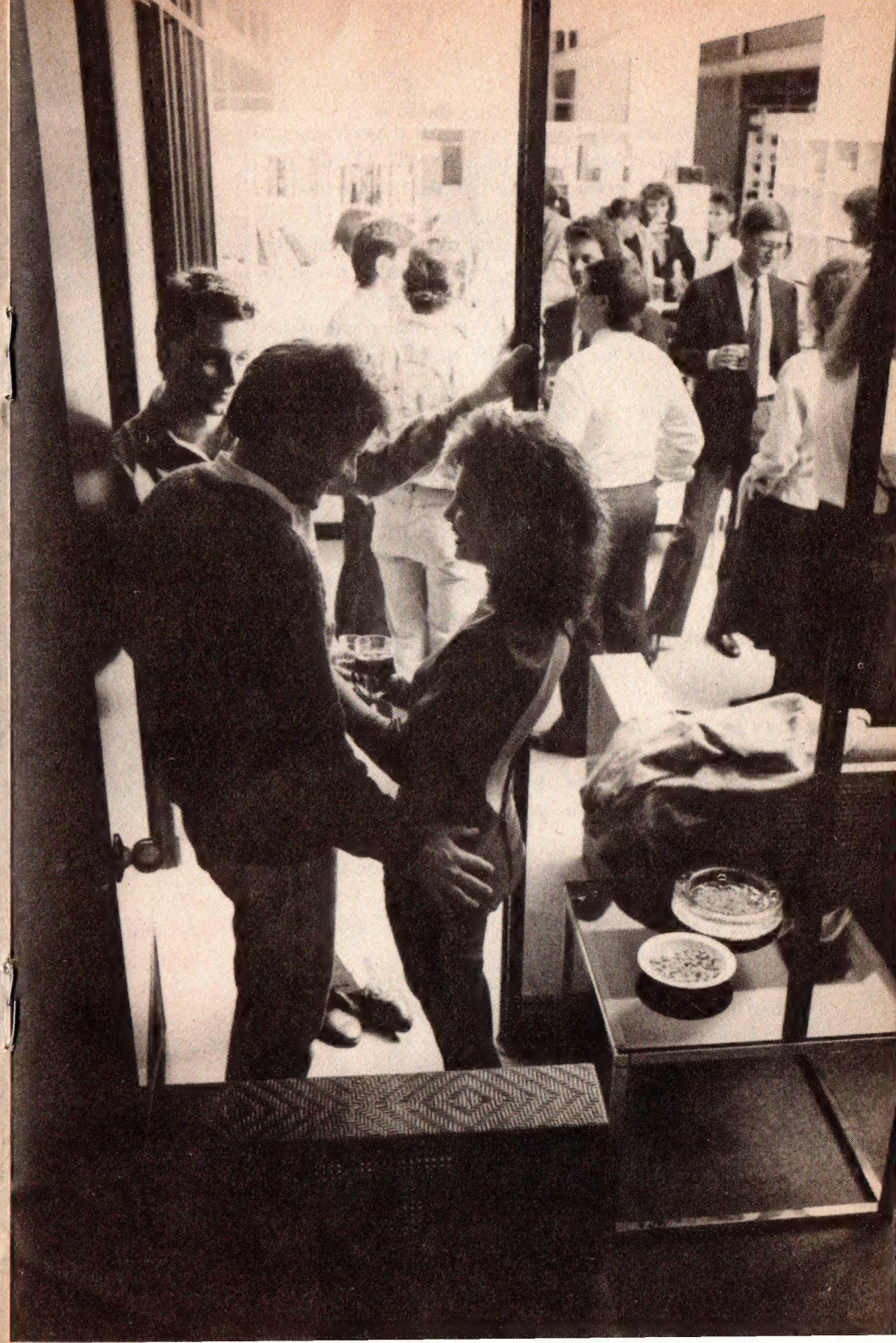
If you're symptom-free but think you're at high risk of having contracted the virus, you may decide to have the test.

Some couples are taking the test before deciding whether to get married or have children.

Think carefully before making a final decision. Consider the consequences of having a positive result.

Many AIDS carriers look and feel perfectly well. Many don't know they have it. Don't risk unsafe sex with someone just because they appear healthy.

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN PORTER



How would you feel? Could you cope with the knowledge? Who would you need to tell? Think, too, of your responsibilities to other people; to your sexual partner and any other sexual contacts.

The result of your test would be completely confidential and everyone who has a positive result to an AIDS antibody test is offered counselling.

To find out where to go for a test, phone one of the numbers listed on the back of this brochure.

You definitely can't catch AIDS by: Working with, sharing accommodation with or eating food prepared by someone with AIDS; going to school with someone with AIDS.

AIDS is not spread through: sneezing, coughing or spitting. If neither person has open cuts or sores in the mouth or on the lips, dry kissing is considered safe. However, deep kissing or open mouthed kissing with an infected person may carry some risk.

The virus is found in saliva, there is no evidence of it being spread in this way. Doctors and scientists all over the world have been doing a lot of research on AIDS since the first case was reported in 1981. Current evidence indicates that casual non-sexual person to person contact does not appear to be associated with a risk of infection.

Other things you can't catch AIDS from include: mosquitos, fleas, toilet seats, money, shopping trolleys, plates, cutlery, drinking glasses, hand shakes or swimming pools.

You can't catch AIDS from giving blood or from living near a hospital or AIDS treatment centre.

In the past, some people caught AIDS through infected blood transfusions. Since May 1985, all blood and blood products in Australia have been tested for AIDS and some blood products heat-treated. Any infected blood is destroyed.

The Red Cross Blood transfusion service is now among the safest in the world.

You needn't fear catching AIDS from ordinary day to day contact. Only unsafe sexual contact or sharing needles and syringes presents a risk.

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN PORTER



You definitely can catch AIDS by:

Unprotected anal intercourse. This is the easiest way to catch AIDS sexually. The rectal lining is often injured during anal intercourse and germs can easily enter the bloodstream. As the virus is found in the cells lining the rectum, it can easily come into contact with the penis as well. Tiny cuts on the penis could increase the risk of infection. A condom, properly used, will minimise this risk.

Unprotected vaginal intercourse. The virus is present in semen, vaginal secretions and menstrual blood. AIDS can be spread in this way, both from man to woman and woman to man. A condom, properly used will minimise this risk.

Sharing IV needles and syringes. This is another easy way to catch AIDS. Small amounts of blood often remain in the needle or syringe after use. The next person to use the syringe injects this blood directly into their bloodstream. If you inject drugs, don't share needles and syringes with anyone.

You may be able to catch AIDS by:

Oral sex. No one has been shown to have caught AIDS through oral sex. However, since the virus is found in semen, vaginal fluids and blood, cuts and sores in the mouth or near the genital area would increase the risk by letting the virus pass directly into the bloodstream.

Reusable tattoo, acupuncture, electrolysis or ear piercing needles. Practitioners should follow the AIDS Task Force guidelines. If the equipment were inadequately sterilised after being used on someone with AIDS, the next person to use them could, in theory, catch AIDS.

How to protect yourself against AIDS.

While there is no cure for AIDS, there are simple steps you can take to protect yourself against it.

Abstinence. You may decide to protect yourself against AIDS by abstaining from sexual intercourse.

PHOTOGRAPH: SANDY EDWARDS



**Once is enough.
Sharing a needle
or syringe with
an AIDS carrier
is one of the
surest ways of
catching it.**

Having one faithful sexual partner. By only ever having sexual relations with one uninfected partner, you will not catch AIDS.

Safer sex.

The AIDS virus is spread by semen, vaginal secretions or blood passing from one person to another. Sexual activities in which this doesn't occur are therefore safer. These include:

Sexual intercourse using a condom. The AIDS virus can't pass through an unbroken condom. Make sure the condom is used correctly. Follow the instructions on the pack or refer to the NACAIDS booklet "Everything you ever wanted to know about condoms."

Mutual masturbation. This is safe if the semen contacts with healthy skin. The contact of semen with open cuts and sores is not safe. Other forms of sexual enjoyment such as massage, body stroking and caressing carry no risk.

Kissing. If neither person has open cuts or sores in the mouth or on the lips, dry kissing is considered safe. However, deep kissing or open mouth kissing of an infected person may carry some risk.

"How can I tell if someone has AIDS?"

Most people who carry the AIDS virus look quite healthy and have no signs or symptoms of AIDS. It is only in the later stages of the disease, categories A and B, that the person looks ill.

AIDS will affect everyone's life, even yours.

Many people still think that AIDS is a disease of homosexual men. In fact AIDS isn't fussy. It can infect anyone and in countries like Africa as many women as men are affected.

In New York City, AIDS is currently the number one killer of women aged 25 to 29.

If you don't already know someone with AIDS, the chances are very high that over the next few years, as

the incidence of the disease increases, someone you know will catch it and perhaps die of it.

Sadly, when AIDS strikes one person, their sexual partner will often catch it too, if they haven't taken precautions. As mothers can pass the disease on to their children at birth, AIDS can have a devastating effect on families.

By taking the simple precautions explained in this brochure, you can prevent the spread of this terrible disease and help to make the world a safer place for everyone.

What you can do to help in the fight against AIDS.

Practising safer sex and not using or sharing IV needles and syringes are the most important contributions you can make in the fight against AIDS.

You can also help by staying informed and informing others of the dangers while dispelling any inaccurate myths that you hear about AIDS.

Your help would also be appreciated in arranging activities aimed at increasing awareness of AIDS in your community.

You could, for instance, arrange for an AIDS expert to address your local residents' association, your school's P & C association, your work associates or your club.

To find out more, call one of the addresses listed on the back of this brochure.

For more information: Phone the number listed below for your State or Territory.

New South Wales.

Albion St. Centre

☎ (02) 332 4000;

AIDS Council of N.S.W.

☎ (02) 211 0499.

Queensland.

AIDS Medical Unit

☎ (07) 224 5526 or

(07) 224 5527;

Queensland AIDS Committee

☎ (07) 844 1990.

Victoria.

Melbourne Communicable

Diseases Centre

☎ (03) 602 4900;

Victorian AIDS Council

☎ (03) 417 1759.

Tasmania.

Health Education Section

☎ (002) 30 2872;

Tasmanian AIDS Council

☎ (002) 31 1930.

Northern Territory.

Communicable Diseases

Centre

☎ (089) 20 8001;

N.T. AIDS Action Council

☎ (089) 41 1711.

Australian Capital Territory.

AIDS Reference Centre

☎ (062) 84 2184 or

(062) 84 2200;

AIDS Action Council of
the ACT

☎ (062) 57 2855.

Western Australia.

Special Clinic

☎ (09) 220 1122;

WA AIDS Council

☎ (09) 227 8619 or

(008) 199 287.

South Australia.

AIDS Programme

☎ (08) 218 3668;

AIDS Council of S.A.

☎ (08) 223 6322.

Ethnic line

☎ (02) 662 6677 10 am to

10 pm or call Toll Free

(008) 023 300.

All the people
photographed in this
brochure are models.
It should in no way be
inferred that they
have AIDS, that they
are at higher than
normal risk of catch-
ing it or that they
are IV drug users.

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